

Improving Care and Institutional Conditions for Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Rights in Belarus

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Executive Summary

This evaluation concerns the Sida funded project “Improving care and institutional conditions for orphans and children deprived of parental rights in Belarus”. The evaluation was conducted by Ram-böll Management, on behalf of Sida during the period February – April 2008. The evaluation focuses on assessing the relevance, effectiveness, impacts, efficiency and sustainability of the support, as well as past and future risks and challenges. It was based on a qualitative evaluation design that has been participatory in nature.

The overall objective of the project is to improve children’s rights in Belarus through the improvement of the conditions of orphaned young children and teenagers, as well as young children and teenagers deprived of parental care (social orphans). The project has been carried out in the period 2005–2008. The project has been constructed around four objectives: improving the conditions for domestic adoptions and conditions for young children remaining in institutional care; preparing teenagers for life beyond institutional care as well as helping young mothers keep their newborn babies; increasing the number of domestic adoptions and foster families; strengthening the capacity of the Belarusian NGOs. The Swedish partner, Adoptionscentrum, has worked closely with their Belarusian partners, two NGOs to implement the project.

The objective of the support is judged to be in line with Swedish and EU priorities with regard to development cooperation in Belarus. Furthermore, the objectives of support are deemed to be relevant in terms of the needs of children and teenagers in Belarus who are orphans (in both senses) as well as the government’s desire to reduce the number of children growing up in institutional care. The project not only contributes towards improving the rights of a particularly vulnerable group in Belarusian society – orphans but also actively supports the development of civil society through cooperation with Belarusian NGOs.

The evaluators assess that objectives of the project have to a large extent been fulfilled. There is evidence to suggest that attitudes have been changed with regard to the rights of children and new methodologies for working with children and teenagers have been introduced. The project’s approach to working nationally and locally is assessed to be a pragmatic and effective solution to working in Belarus. This said the evaluators conclude that the objective of supporting single mothers to maintain their parental rights has only partly been achieved.

Data has not been collected systematically regarding impacts within the project plus it is only possible to look at short term impacts. The evaluators find that there is evidence to suggest that the project has had some impact with regard to increasingly the number of domestic adoptions as well as improving the conditions for children growing up in institutional care.

The evaluators conclude that Sida should consider funding a new phase of the project given the results achieved and in light of the relevance of continuing to promote children’s rights as well as the role of civil society in Belarus. The evaluators make a number of recommendations based on the lessons learned from this phase of the project which include the following: increased focus on gender equality; introduction of targeted activities towards the directors of institutions to ensure sustainability; the Swedish partner to take a more active role in coaching the Belarusian NGOs as well as discussing key messages and methodologies which are the subject of training; need for improved indicators and monitoring of results; support the development of standards and monitoring of foster families etc.; develop clear risk and exit strategies,

1 Introduction

1.1 Origin and Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation of a Sida funded project in Belarus to improve the care and institutional conditions for orphans was commissioned by Sida in January 2008. As stated in the terms of reference for the assignment the evaluation deals with both the implementation process of the project as well as its impact and can therefore be seen as both a process and impact evaluation. Sida has given support to the project for a number of years and prior to taking a new decision on support Sida would like to know how efficient the past support has been, its strengths, weaknesses, main results, as well as past and future risks and challenges.

The evaluation is structured around a number of key evaluation criteria which moreover form the basis for the structure of this report. The criteria are as follows:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability

Based on the results of the evaluation the evaluation team summarises the lessons learned from the implementation of the project and also provides recommendations on how to organise work in this sector in the future in Belarus.

Swedish assistance to improving children's rights through the improvement of the living conditions for orphans began in Belarus in the 1990s both directly through Sida and also through Forum Syd. Adoptionscentrum (the Swedish partner) has been involved in these activities since this time and over the years has established good working relations with among others Belarusian NGOs working in this area. Adoptionscentrum carried out a Sida financed project during the period 2003–2005 together with the National Adoption Centre in Belarus – this can be called Phase 1 of the project. Adoptionscentrum was then contracted by Sida to carry out a project together with ROO Roditel'skij Dom (RD) and MOO Zdorovyj Vybor (ZV) two Belarusian NGOs during the period 2005–2008. The project expanded its scope somewhat and can be said to be more of a programme than project. It is the second phase of Swedish assistance this is the object of this evaluation though it should be noted that considerable steps were made during the first phase of the project not least in terms of laying the foundations for the work that has been carried out during this second phase.

The evaluation was carried out in the period February–April 2008.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation is based on a qualitative evaluation design that has been participatory in nature. The data collection methods that have been primarily used are desk research and interviews both in Sweden and Belarus. Interviews have been conducted with a wide range of stakeholders including project managers, trainers, donors, participants in the various project activities as well as civil servants in Belarus where possible. Follow-up interviews have also been conducted with the Swedish partners following the field mission conducted in March 2008.

Observation has also played a key part in the methodology for this evaluation. The evaluators have for example been able to visit a large number of institutions who have received support through the project and even been present in group activities conducted as a part of the project.

One of the limitations of this evaluation is the evaluators' ability to draw concrete conclusions about the impacts of the project due to the fact that the project's wider impacts have not been followed up systematically. Nevertheless some conclusions are drawn based on the evidence available.

A full list of those interviewed can be found in Annex 1 to this report and a table of evaluation questions and indicators can be found in Annex 2.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The report is structured in the following manner:

- First, an overview of the project;
- Second, the *relevance* of working in this specific area in a national context and vis à vis the Swedish strategy for development cooperation with Belarus is discussed;
- Third, an analysis of the *effectiveness* of the project and in particular each component is presented;
- Fourth, the *impacts* that can be traced are discussed;
- Fifth, the *cost-effectiveness* of the project activities are discussed;
- Sixth, the *sustainability* of the methods and working practices that have been introduced as a part of the project are analysed;
- And finally the evaluators provide *lessons learned* and *recommendations* based on the analysis of the data collected.

2 Project Description

The overall objective of the project is to improve children's rights in Belarus through the improvement of the conditions of orphaned young children and teenagers as well as young children and teenagers deprived of parental care (social orphans). More specifically the aim of the project is to give more orphans the opportunity to grow in family like conditions (biological, adoptive or foster family) as well as to prepare those teenagers who remain in institutional care for life beyond the institution.

There are four main components to the project, each of which has a number of subcomponents:

1. Improve the possibilities for domestic adoption as well as the living conditions for young children remaining in institutional care;
2. Improve the possibilities for the preparation of teenagers living in institutions for life beyond the institution as well as the opportunities for young single mothers to keep their newborn babies rather than the babies ending up in care;
3. Increase the number of domestic adoptions and the number of foster families in Belarus;
4. Strengthen the capacity of the Belarusian NGOs that work actively within the project.

The main instruments for achieving these objectives have been training of a variety of different types of staff working with children and teenagers in institutional care, as well as those working with the placement of children in family like situations, seminars and conferences for a wide range of stakeholders including government, the development and production of educational materials, development of advertising campaigns, website development for the national adoption centre and study tours.

Support is provided through Adoptionscentrum, a Swedish organisation that has been involved in supporting questions of adoption, fostering and the conditions of children and young adults living in institutions in Belarus, among other countries over a long period of time.

Evaluative Judgements

3 Relevance

In the following section of the report the evaluators consider the relevance of the Sida financed project in relation to the current situation for children and young adults in Belarus in institutional care, the political situation, and Sida's strategy for development cooperation.

Political power in Belarus is increasingly concentrated in the hands of Alexander Lukashenko. The President and his staff currently control most of what is taking place in the political and economic sphere. While an election was held in 2006 there is without doubt a lack of democracy within the country.

In recent years Belarus has embarked on a number of reforms in education, health and social protection. The extent to which all these reforms address issues of efficiency and equity so that the most vulnerable remain at the centre of attention is somewhat debateable. According to the World Bank, poverty has declined significantly in Belarus over the past eight years. The decline in poverty has largely been achieved through maintaining an extensive system of social protection, services and administrative wage increases. But inequalities remain. People residing in rural areas represent 34.9 per cent of the poor and families with three or more children have three times the risk of being poor.

The institutionalisation of orphans and of children deprived of parental care (social orphans) has until the 1990s been viewed as really the only alternative in terms of the care of this vulnerable group for the Belarusian government. Adoption and foster care have become more widely accepted as an alternative to institutional care in recent years though many still experience social stigma concerning this¹. This has resulted in large numbers of children and teenagers, including those with disabilities growing up in institutional care with little or no chance of experiencing a family life though this number is now decreasing². In recent years there has been a tendency to place children with disabilities who are in need of special protection in more integrated education rather than just special education boarding schools. There are still however significant number of children with disabilities living in some form of institutional care.

¹ According to Belarusian legislation strict confidentiality concerning adoptions is essential. The situation of adoptive families can therefore only be followed up on the premise that the family has applied to a court of law to have this restriction removed. This means in reality that while some adoptive families are willing to declare that they have adopted child few actually go through a court procedure for the restriction to be removed which is not surprising.

² The number of children living in institutional care was 13 016 in 2003 and in 2007 this number has been reduced to 10 307 according to the National Adoption Centre.

According to UNICEF deprivation of parental rights has been the main cause for children becoming social orphans and is increasingly associated with parental neglect and alcoholism. Alcoholism is a widespread problem within Belarus.

3.1 The Legislative Framework and Policy Initiatives

The President has over the past few years taken some steps towards prioritising improving the conditions of children and teenagers in Belarus. He has through Presidential Decree passed the Law on the Rights of the Child, the Presidential Programme the ‘Children of Belarus’, as well as the National Plan of Action on the improvement of the situation of children and protection of their rights 2004–2010. In general terms these policies are aligned with the Sida funded project in that a clear message emanating from these policies is that the best place for children to grow up is in the family (in the broadest sense). It should also be noted that increasing birth rates is a major direction of the social policy in Belarus. On the one hand the President emphasizes that if Belarus is to grow as a nation then families need to have three or more children rather than the one or two they usually have. More support is therefore to be provided to families who have three or more children. On the other hand the President recognises the problem of social orphanhood and that parents do not take care of their children. As a means of trying to support this increase in the birth rate, while not increasing the number of social orphans, the President has introduced a range of measures, mainly in the form of financial incentives to manage this. For example through the programme the ‘Children of Belarus’ in the sub project ‘social protection of families and children’ the President promises increases by 2009 in the child care benefits for families with children up to the age of 3³.

The President has also introduced disincentives for parents to neglect their parental responsibilities. For example, through Presidential decree number 18, November 24, 2006 parents who lose their ‘parental rights’ according to a court of law are now responsible for making a financial contribution to the upkeep of their children if they end up in institutional care. The cost is approximately 55 Euros per child per month. The introduction of this decree of course has a direct impact on many children. The question is to what extent this positive or negative. It might mean that parents facing the threat of losing their parental rights are more interested in trying to resolve their problems and build positive relationships to their children. On the other hand it might of course lead to problems being driven underground as parents do not want to face these costs. The latter is of course the worst scenario for the child or teenager.

Moreover, in recent years a number of residential institutions for orphans have actually been closed down which further indicates a commitment to reducing the number of children in institutional care. Two residential institutions have apparently been closed over the last year and a number of the institutions that the evaluators visited had experienced a reduction in the number of children living there in comparison with for example five years ago.

3.2 Analysis of the Relevance of the Specific Objectives of the Project

It is the evaluator’s judgment that the objectives of the project have been relevant in terms of the needs and priorities of its target groups namely staff working with orphans both in institutions, as child protection officers, decision makers, children and teenagers themselves, as well as single young mothers.

The following issues were identified as being problems to be addressed within the framework of the project.

- Increase in the number of children in institutional care

³ Source the official internet site of the President of the Republic of Belarus, accessed 2008-02-18, published 2006-02-14

- Adoption is not widely socially accepted within Belarus
- Adoptive and foster families are not adequately prepared for their new role
- Personnel working with children in institutional care lack training
- Child protection officers lack training
- Lack of coordination between institutions responsible for the care of orphans
- Young adults living in institutional care lack social and practical skills for life beyond institutional care
- Young single mothers who have themselves experienced institutional care often abandon their own children

Desk research and interviews with stakeholders both within and external to the project confirm that this problem identification was well-founded.

The manner in which the project has been organised and the activities conducted with different target groups is judged to be relevant given the overall objective of the project. One aspect that could however be strengthened is the extent to which the number of children placed in institutional care can be reduced without a greater focus on prevention. It is not perhaps within the scope of this project to work beyond that of supporting single mothers who have themselves experienced institutional care but synergy effects between work in this project and other Sida financed interventions in the social sector could be explored in more detail. For example, the work of Socialhögskolan with social shelters is of relevance in this matter⁴.

3.3 Alignment with Sidas Development Cooperation Strategy and that of Other Donors

It is the opinion of the evaluators that the project is relevant in terms of the operationalisation of the Country strategy for development cooperation with Belarus 2007–2010. The strategy clearly states that ‘the primary aim of Swedish development cooperation should therefore be to strengthen people’s awareness of their rights and their ability to invoke them... Efforts should focus on making it possible for Belarusian citizens and organisations to establish the broadest possible contract and relations with the outside world, primarily Sweden and the European Union.’⁵ The strategy goes on to list a number of target groups including NGOs and young people. The latter of which it is hoped can be expected to drive social development and bring about change in the future.

The project, which is the subject of this evaluation, should not merely be seen as a social sector project, which is a sector that is prioritised within the strategy, in the view of the evaluators. A key aspect of this project is to strengthen the capacity of the Belarusian NGOs that implement the project. Two Belarusian NGOs are involved in the implementation of the project which are very different in terms of their nature.

The first RD has very close connections to among other governmental institutions, the National Adoption Centre, mainly as a result of the fact that a number of the staff at RD have previously been employed at the centre. The second NGO, ZV is very much a so-called ‘grass roots’ NGO that has grown over the past few years but that lacks to the same degree the political connections that RD enjoys. There are of course positives and negatives associated with both these positions. On the one

⁴ A new Sida financed initiative implemented by Socialhögskolan and Adoptionscentrum as the Swedish partners has started since the evaluation was carried out.

⁵ p.1 Strategy for development cooperation with Belarus, 2007–2008

hand it is useful within such a highly regulated country such as Belarus to have some connections and to be able to lobby at quite a high political level. On the other hand it could be judged in a less positive manner in terms of the NGO's ability and perhaps willingness to 'challenge' the status quo of government where and when needed which is quite often one of the roles of NGOs. Supporting the work of both NGOs is judged to be relevant, however, the importance of the independence of NGOs in relation government should not be forgotten in light of Sida's country strategy.

The project moreover helps to expose young people, a target group mentioned in the strategy, to democratic principles. For example, the way in which teenagers are treated within certain aspects of the project promotes their own self awareness, their ability to influence their own decisions and to work together in a democratic environment. The project furthermore places the rights of the individual in focus. This again is a priority for Swedish development cooperation in Belarus. The project achieves this by, for example, encouraging those who work with children and teenagers in care to use each child or teenager's personal history and situation as the starting point for any work that they do with them.

A key aspect for all Sida funded interventions is the focus on poverty reduction. Here it is important to consider not just economic poverty but also social poverty. This project addresses a very vulnerable group in Belarusian society – orphans in all senses, especially those with disabilities, as well as for example single mothers. Working to facilitate the empowerment of children and putting them in the centre – by seeing things in a more child-centered manner is also an important means of reducing poverty.

The project is judged to be in alignment with the policies of other donors active within Belarus. The EU is working actively to support the development of civil society and USAID is for example working to support the social sector as well through improving the living conditions of children in institutional care as well.⁶

3.4 Conclusions

The project is assessed as relevant in terms of contributing to the improvement of children's rights through the promotion of adoption and alternative family-like solutions for care of vulnerable children and teenagers, as well as providing support in terms of the preparation for teenagers for life beyond institutional care. The project is also relevant in terms of the support it gives to strengthening civil society which is a mechanism that is highly prioritised by Sweden and other donors. An important factor for the project to consider in the future will be the challenge of working within a policy framework that supports the placement of orphaned children in family like care solutions either through adoption, fostering or group homes that should preferably also support the reintegration of children back into their biological families where possible but that really does maintain the needs of the child at the forefront of all processes. There is no doubt that financial incentives will continue to be used as a means of encouraging this shift from institutional to family care where possible from the policy level but it is important that those taking on parental responsibilities as well as child protection officers are still able to put the needs of the child and their specific history and situation first.

⁶ More details of the USAID project can be found later in the report.

4 Effectiveness

In order to assess the effectiveness tried to answer the following evaluations questions:

- Has the Sida financed intervention achieved its objectives or will it do so in the future?
- Have there been deviations in implementation, and how have these been handled by the project?
- What have been the main risks, and risk management, in the ongoing implementation, and which are the specific risks foreseen for any future implementation?

The discussion in the following sections takes its starting point in indicators that have been identified as essential for the assessment of the effectiveness in the project⁷.

The overall purpose of the project is to increase the rights of children by improving the living conditions of orphaned young children and teenagers in Belarus. The four main objectives of the project are:

1. Decrease the number of children in institutional care primarily through adoption and where not possible through foster families
2. Improve the living conditions of children in institutions
3. Improve the possibilities for teenagers living in institutions to be prepared for life outside the institution and for young single mothers to keep their newborn babies
4. Strengthen the capacity of RD and ZV NGOs

Though it is possible to establish the fact that the project has lead to concrete results, it is more difficult to measure impact, due to the lack of systematically collected data and statistics. The issue of impacts is discussed in more detail in the next section of the report. Below follows a more general discussion of the extent to which the main objectives of the project have been achieved.

4.1 Decrease in Children Living in Institutional Care

The number of children living in institutional care has decreased during the period of the project. In 2005 there were 11 582 children living in institutions, the number was reduced to 10 307 in 2007⁸. The reason for this development can partly be attributed to the fact that there has been an increase in numbers of domestic adoptions since 2005 from 368 to 539 in 2007, as well as an increase in the number of children placed in foster families from 1208 in 2005 to 1692 in 2007.

The majority of children being adopted are girls, due to the fact that there is a greater demand for girls among potential adoptive parents since boys are considered to be more difficult to take care of⁹. The increase in children being adopted also mainly concerns infants, since 75 per cent of the adopted children were newborns and up to three years of age, whereas 20 per cent were between the ages of three and five. This is not an uncommon phenomenon throughout the world. As stated there has also been an increase in the numbers of foster families, which to a larger extent gives older children the chance to grow up in family like conditions. One point to note is that the number of children actually being reintegrated in to their biological families has fallen slightly since 2005 from 37 children to 34. What is interesting is that there was a significant increase in 2006 where 55 children were reintegrated but this positive trend has not been sustained. The number of children now living in what can be

⁷ More details of the indicators used can be found in Annex 2 of this report in the Evaluation matrix.

⁸ All statistics come from the National Adoption Centre, the body responsible for managing these statistics.

⁹ According to Adoptioncentrum this is not an uncommon phenomenon in many countries.

described as group family homes has also increased during the period 2005–2007 from 101 to 161 children.

A more positive public opinion and a greater interest in adoption in Belarus is assessed to have been achieved through activities like advertisements, PR and information campaigns on the Internet and on television, carried out by RD in cooperation with the National Adoption Centre. The project partners have seen an increase among potential adoptive parents directly after these campaigns, though no statistics regarding this were available.

The training of both staff at institutions and of child protection officers seems to have led to the result that the competence of professionals has increased concerning the importance of children growing up in families or family like conditions. Although it is likely that both activities like information campaigns and trainings to a certain degree affected the possibilities to domestic adoptions in a positive way, there are also external factors to take into consideration. This means that due to the lack of systematically collected data and statistics concerning this it is not possible for the evaluators to establish a very clear positive relationship at this point of time. For example, the increase in financial incentives to adopt or foster children could also be a factor in this, though there is no doubt that many of the parents wanting to adopt have cited the advertising campaign as the main catalyst to their becoming interested in adoption.

Another alternative to institutional care that has become increasingly common over the past few years are the so called “group homes”. Taking into account that there can be 8–10 children in these homes, including the families own biological children, raises the question of how institutional and family care are defined. According to those interviewed there is a growing awareness among authorities in Belarus that adoption is more suitable for children than foster care. As a result of this growing awareness it is now the case that authorities are not allowed to place young, healthy children, where the prospects of being adopted are good, in foster care. It is therefore of great importance to increase both adoptive- and foster families competence on how to take care of children and improve the organization of foster care when adoption is not an alternative. It should be remembered that due to the number of social orphans adoption is not always an option, which is why it is important to work on improving foster care.

It is the assessment of the evaluators’ that the project has contributed in a positive way to improving the preparation of potential adoptive parents prior to an adoption being completed. While it is not possible to state to what extent the activities in the project have resulted in an increase in the number of qualified adoptive parents, it is however the assessment of the evaluators that RD, within the scope of the project, has developed new ways of working with potential and actual adoptive parents that are actively used. The methodology mainly consists of psychological training and conversations with potential parents to prepare them for the adoption. Furthermore RD carried out several activities to support adopting parents in different ways. They provided for example textbooks and other educational material and arranged a conference for adoptive families, foster homes and family children’s home and seminars for psychologists and social pedagogues to support and follow-up of receiving families. These tools are actively used by the National Adoption Centre¹⁰.

It is, however, important to note that there are restrictions concerning the possibilities to control that only ‘competent’ adoptive parents are actually approved as adoptive parents as national legislation stipulates that no one is allowed to be denied to adopt a child as long as they are under the age of 65 and have the economic conditions to take care of another person. What the child protection officers and psychologists working at the national adoption centre have been able to do is make sure that those parents going through the process are prepared in the best possible way. They say that this has led to several potential adoptive parents not following the process the whole way as they themselves have realized their own inadequacies.

¹⁰ All adoptions must be processed by the National Adoption Centre according to Belarusian legislation.

4.2 Improved Living Conditions of Children in Institutions

A large number of the staff the evaluators talked to stated that they had gained new and important knowledge about the development of a child's identity and how to handle emotions, including distress, of orphaned children, as a direct result of activities in the project such as training, conferences and work shops. Staff were able to give concrete examples of how this had changed their approach to work and communication with children. Activities concerning the training of staff can therefore be said to have contributed to a higher level of awareness of the needs of orphaned children in institutions. An important result that also was mentioned by staff in several institutions was that they learned to be honest towards the child about its history, future and family conditions.

An important activity within the project in relation to this aspect has been the providing of the book "My story", which has been distributed to hundreds of children in institutions. The assessment of the evaluators is that this book has been of great importance in the work with identity development of children, but there is a need to be more effective regarding the distribution of the book to all children in all institutions.

An additional result of the education of staff in institutions that has been stated as important is the knowledge that they are allowed to get emotionally attached to children, which moreover resulted in staff taking children home over weekends or holidays. It was also mentioned that having favorites among children was not to be seen as a problem but rather positive. Being true to their own emotions is of course an important part of staff being able to get closer to the children in institutional care, which in turn is positive for the children. It is however important to remember that there are risks in having and declaring favourites among the children in care. Some might quite simply be left out which can reinforce their feelings of neglect.

In terms of the introduction of methods aimed at helping staff to prepare children for adoption the evaluators assess the effectiveness to differ between institutions that have taken part in the project activities. This judgement also applies to the effectiveness of the methods applied to prepare children for the move from one institution to another. In most cases the preparation seemed to consist of informing the child about the new situation. This is of course a positive step in itself that the child is informed but in some institutions this was carried out in a more child centered way than others. The expected result of the project to promote coordinating mechanisms and cooperation between small children's home and children's home is a way to improve and support the preparation of a child moving from one home to another. According to the interviews some institutions have a close cooperation; however it is not clear whether the project has in fact succeeded in promoting such coordinating mechanisms or if this is a result of other factors and circumstances.

An aspect that seems to have an important influence on the possibilities to achieve the objectives of the project is the extent to which the manager of the institution is open towards changes being made in the way of working with the children. This applies not just to the institutions for younger children but also those for teenagers. Institutions with more progressive directors have tended to adopt new ideas and methods more effectively than other institutions, and most importantly seemed to support a more profound and thereby sustainable change. It is therefore important to consider the issue of 'coaching' the heads of the various institutions where necessary.

The evaluators consider the support and competence provided through the Swedish partner Adoption-sentrum to the organizations in Belarus to have played an important role in the overall achievement of the objective to improve the living conditions of children in institutions. It is however important to provide continuously support, particularly with regard to following up methodologies employed and implemented by the staff in institutions.

4.3 The preparation of teenagers' for a life outside institutions

Apart from activities that contribute to developing important life skills such as cooking classes and vocational training which are essential for teenagers leaving institutional care, the project has managed to effectively carry out activities that have strengthened the identity of teenagers that have taken part in project activities. This has particularly been the case in the areas where ZV has been involved in the implementation of project activities. Examples include psychological training and discussion groups for teenage girls and boys, planning and carrying out projects themselves which foster a sense of community spirit and team building, sport- and health activities such as break-dance and dance classes. By attending these activities teenagers learn to cooperate and to reflect about their future and about questions concerning family life, work life, relationships, education etc. The evaluators consider activities that provide opportunities for active participation and self-reflection to be very effective in preparing teenagers for future life than those that mainly focus on providing them with information and education about for example sexual reproduction, prevention, health or work life. Moreover, it was clear to see that among some of the groups carrying out cooking classes for example that the conversations about personal issues were just as important as learning how to cook.

According to the assessment of the evaluators the activities carried out by ZV have been very effective in terms of the preparation of teenagers for life beyond institutional care especially in relation to value for money. The important conclusion that can be drawn here is that the methods used are more important than material supplies. It is therefore of great importance to continue to develop methods in a flexible and creative way.

It is the opinion of the evaluators that a gender perspective is only really addressed specifically through some of the work carried out with a number of the teenage groups. Both girls and boys living in institutional care need to be prepared for life beyond institutional care. It is currently only ZV that addresses the needs of boys directly in this matter. It is without doubt important to prepare girls for life beyond institutional care but boys also, for example, need to learn to cook. Girls are of course vulnerable to getting pregnant and perhaps abandoning their child but young men can also have a role to play in trying to reduce this problem. It would be beneficial for all if a gender perspective were employed throughout all of the project activities. There are after all a higher percentage of males in institutional care than females.

It is also assessed to be important to have both men and women working with the teenagers. Not only due to the importance of male role models for boys but also the importance for girls to have them to be able to create good relations to men in their future life.

As for the expected objective to increase awareness and improve the competence of staff working at the institutions the evaluators assess that the project has not been as effective in meeting this challenge. This is mainly due to the fact that the preparation of teenagers is almost exclusively carried out by the staff of the organisations ZV and RD and not by the staff in the institutions. Though some staff are of course involved. What is clear is that the methodologies and ideas employed by the organisations are not widely spread among the staff working in the respective institutions. Just as for the work with younger children, an important condition for the possibility to implement new methods and keep maintain knowledge within the institution is in the extent to which the manager of the institution is open towards such ideas and methods.

4.4 Increase the Numbers of Mothers who Keep their Children

It has been verified that several young women who had lost or were about to lose their parental rights received support and training by the single mothers club run by ZV, and could thereby keep or regain their parental rights. Still a key factor that affects the number of young mothers leaving their babies is

the lack of exposure to socialization skills in the institutions. This tends to have the effect that many young women that have children, who have themselves grown up in institutional care leave their own new-born babies there too. One approach to breaking this vicious circle is by preparing young women and men for the life beyond institutional care, which the project tries to tackle.

It has turned out that the project has had difficulties to reach the right target group, i.e. young single mothers, hence the single mothers club mainly consisted of mothers of older age groups. This seems to have improved during the time of the project and there are now also a number of younger single mothers in the group who have themselves grown up in institutional care. The 'problem' of having reached a slightly different target group than originally intended has actually has the positive unexpected impact of helping to make the young single mothers more comfortable in attending the group and where they show an interest in the other mothers approach to dealing with their problems. What is also positive, though unexpected is the fact that two single fathers joined the group, which was stated to give the group new dynamics. From a gender perspective it is assessed to be important to address single fathers for several reasons. A problem in Belarus in relation to child care and orphaned children is a general opinion that men are regarded not to be able to take care of children, with the effect that children without a mother but with a father often are either taken care of by other female relatives or sent to institutions. It is therefore not only considered to be important for the men that actually receive the support but it also can serve as a contribution to change the public opinion on this which in a long run can lead to better possibilities for men to take a greater responsibility for family and children.

Another means of trying to reduce the number of young mothers abandoning their new born babies is to support the development of a mothers' home that offers a place for mother and child to bond in a supportive and caring environment. It has been one of the objectives of the project to support the establishment of such a home. The home has however not yet been established and at the time of writing an essential commitment from the Belarusian authorities to maintain funding for such an institution following its establishment has not been given. It seems therefore unlikely that this objective will be achieved within the current project period.

4.5 Strengthening the Capacity of the Belarusian NGOs

On the whole the evaluators assesses that both organisations working with the project in Belarus have managed difficult processes effectively. Despite, for example, staff turnover and the change in leadership within RD, the work has been carried out effectively, which indicates a strong organisation in it self, not too dependent on a few individuals. ZV has shown great flexibility in relation to the strategies used to overcome different barriers. Furthermore both organizations are effectively using their existing and new networks.

As stated previously the two NGOs are different in nature and there are therefore similarities and differences in the ways in which the organizations can further be strengthened. RD has shown itself to be a robust organization that is more than the sum of its parts which is testament to the fact that it has been strengthened through the project. RD an NGO that has a closer connection to government authorities is in a good position to be able to use its connections to lobby for policy changes, though the extent to which this is possible is of course generally limited within Belarus given the current political situation. Nevertheless RD is in a good position to be a strong voice in the area of children's rights if it can manage to balance its close relationship to government with being an NGO. ZV has also demonstrated that they have developed as an organization throughout the project period and have benefited from strong support from Adoptionscentrum. The organization has shown itself adept to manage challenges and to maintain its independence in a difficult political climate which must be praised.

4.6 Deviations in Implementation, Risk and Risk Management

For the most part the intended activities in the project have been implemented as planned. RD has carried out training, conferences and seminars, published educational and informational material and advertisement in different forms. The only activities planned by RD but not yet implemented are a finishing conference for adoptive families, foster homes and family children's home and the establishment of a home for single mothers. The conference was delayed but will be held in July 2008. The home for single mothers however is still being planned, yet it is still not clear where or when it will be established due to difficulties to find a suitable and not too expensive place for the home plus most importantly a commitment from Belarusian authorities to maintain funding for the institution once it is up and running.

The organizations have experienced problems carrying out some activities as they need to have the Ministry of Education's approval. Consequently the survey "Children's living conditions in different family forms" and the activity "Criteria's for children's well being in different family forms" have been delayed. The activity "Round table discussion – Cooperation between different authorities to protect the child's right to an upbringing in a family" needed the vice Minister of Education's direct approval. Estimations are made in the beginning of every period to analyze what activities that is possible to implement. Adoptionscentrum, RD and ZV try to plan activities that are not directly dependent on support and approval from foremost The Ministry of Education to minimise delays in implementation.

The activities planned by ZV have been carried out, even though not all of them have been implemented the way they were planned from the beginning, mostly due to resistance from some institutions and boarding schools where directors seemed to see methods used by the organisation as a threat to the work at the institution. ZV, however, found new ways to implement the intended activities like a girls group, by arranging the classes outside the institution. By adapting the strategies to the barriers arisen, the organization managed to carry out intended activities and thereby also attain expected results. The way in which they have worked and dealt with the barriers that faced them has had the unexpected positive effect that they have gained respect among, for example, the education committee of Minsk, as well as a number of the directors of institutions. This has in turn led to a wider acceptance of the methodologies they employ and even a greater demand for their involvement in some institutions.

As mentioned previously, key to the achievement of results is the attitude of directors of institutions. The NGOs have themselves stated that efforts have had to be made to involve the directors and to work with the relationship between staff and directors. This was not planned or expected, but proved to be necessary. What is more, the training of staff has exposed the fact that it takes time to sow the seeds for change and that a key issue to consider is that staff working in institutions are 'burned out', especially at boarding schools for older children and teenagers. In comparison it appears that staff at the institutions for the youngest children (0–3 years) are often more eager to receive information and training. The organizations have therefore had to adjust the training sessions to the target group where some groups foremost need to be inspired before a change can be achieved.

4.7 Conclusion

The project has operated across Belarus, though there has been somewhat of a focus of activities in and around Minsk. Nevertheless it is the evaluators' opinion that the project has reached a large proportion of staff and professionals working with issues concerning adoptions and the care of children and teenagers in institutions. RD has been particularly good in trying to share knowledge across the country as well as working at the national level. The project's approach to working nationally and locally within institutions is assessed to be a pragmatic and effective solution to working in Belarus.

Almost all activities have been carried out as planned and the evaluators consider that the project has to a high degree achieved its expected results in terms of changing attitudes, introducing new methodologies that are actively used by professionals working with orphans and children deprived of parental care. It is however the judgement of the evaluators that the objective of supporting single young mothers to keep their newborn babies/young children has only partly been achieved.

The evaluators assess that there is evidence to suggest a causal link between an increase in domestic adoptions and the work of the project though it is of course impossible to say with confidence that this is the only contributing factor. It should be remembered that the national adoption centre has received a clear mandate from the Government to support domestic adoption and that this cannot be directly attributed to the project. Nevertheless what is clear is that the project activities have been relevant in light of the prioritization of this issue and are therefore a factor in the overall increase in both domestic adoptions and foster care.

Generally speaking the projects objective to improve the living conditions of children in institutions has been achieved. Awareness among staff working at in particular institutions for young children and babies has been improved which has been the focus of the project activities. Awareness at institutions for teenagers is however somewhat limited.

The evaluators judge that the project has managed effectively to improve the possibilities for teenagers to prepare for a life outside the institution. The project, notably the activities carried out by ZV, are assessed to have contributed to a greater democratic awareness and positive social development of teenagers.

Due to the lack of documentation and follow up on results by the organizations in the project, it is not clear to what extent the project managed to increase the numbers of young single mothers who keep their new born babies. Though, the evaluators assess that it seems to be an increase due to the support to single mothers given within the project. It should however be noted that this is currently on a very small scale and really only in Minsk.

It is the assessment of the evaluators that the cooperation between the Swedish and the Belarusian partners has strengthened the national NGOs as organizations in different ways. There is potential to strengthen these organisations further.

Finally, the evaluators want to stress the importance of more systematic follow-up on results, whereby results demonstrate for example some kind of change in attitude or working methods and not just reporting based on outputs i.e. the number of people trained. This applies to both organizations, but particular to the work of ZV. This is not only essential in relation to be able to show statistics and results to financiers and stakeholders but also for the project to learn about what works well and what does not. It should be noted that RD has made some progress in this area but results reporting could be improved further with support from Adoptionscentrum.

5 Impact

In the following section the general impacts of the project which have been identified by the evaluators are discussed to the extent possible given limitations in the data available as well as the fact that the project is not yet completed. It should be noted that real impacts can usually only be observed over a longer period of time following the intervention. Therefore the impacts discussed below should be viewed mainly as likely and definite impacts.

5.1 Awareness on Issues Particular to Children in Institutions

The assessment of the evaluators is that the awareness on issues particular to children in institutions has increased, especially concerning an awareness of the importance of giving children both emotional support and honest and correct information about their background such as biological parents, siblings, etc. The distribution of the book “My story” is considered to be an important factor in the dissemination of this awareness to institutions and alternative caretakers. It has been stated that adopting a child has long been regarded as shameful in the Belarusian society, with the consequence that a lot of adopting parents have kept adoption secret and would tell neither the child nor other people about the adoption. According to interviews carried out in this evaluation this social outlook on adoption has started to change. This change is most possible due to a lot of factors, but the evaluators assess it to be likely that the project activities have contributed to this in a positive way, by for example information campaigns. Additionally this change in attitude towards adoption has not only improved the conditions for children in institutions but it also seems to have resulted in an increase in numbers of potential adoptive parents.

5.2 Methodologies Implemented for Adoption

A factor that seems to have had an impact on the numbers of children taken care of by foster families and adoptive parents is how the child protection officers work. According to various sources in Belarus some child protection officers are increasingly focused on the interests of the child now than a couple of years ago. It is however difficult to say on the basis of the data available if the only contributing factor is the activities of the project.

The project has also enabled RD and the National adoption centre to develop and implement better methodologies for the adoption process by preparing and supporting foster- and adoptive parents. These are methodologies that are now being employed for every adoption in Belarus. The evaluators assess that project activities such as advertising and information campaigns have had an impact on the number of interested and potential adoptive parents. It is though important to bear in mind that an increased number of people interested in adopting a child makes the implementation of effective methodologies to prepare and support the parents even more essential. Just how sustainable these impacts are remains to be seen. It is often the case that advertising campaigns have a direct impact but that interest then wanes.

5.3 Policies and Allocated Resources

As a direct result of the project institutions and boarding schools that received support through the project have been able to purchase equipment that facilitates and support and development of children. It is clear to see that there is a degree of governmental support to providing resources for institutions though the institutions but only for the basics and no funds are provided to supporting new kinds of activities that support the emotional and social development of children beyond that that has been carried out previously in these institutions. For anything like this the institutions rely on external support. As yet no impact on government policy in this respect can be demonstrated which is important in terms of sustainability.

At the policy level the assessment of the evaluators is that the project may well have had an impact on the development of state policies on rights of children and on young parents to get support, mostly by increasing the awareness of the key issues. A change that has been made is for example that psychological training and diagnosis of potential adoptive- and foster parents is compulsory in Belarus since 2006, even if they already have biological children. It is however not possible to determine the extent to which the project has made a contribution in this area.

What is also important is that the project co-workers in both organizations consider their relation to state agencies to be improved. This is foremost stated to be due to the respect they feel that they have received for their work by having been able to show results. Both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour have supported the project in different though albeit limited ways. With this said it is important to bear in mind that it is difficult for an NGO in the Belarusian political context to promote and suggest policy changes. Nevertheless the evaluators assess that the project has had an impact and has the possibility to have a further impact due to its relation to state agencies.

5.4 Gender Perspective

Even though there is an awareness of specific gender related problems within the project, the assessment of the evaluators is that the gender aspect has not been addressed sufficiently. Firstly, activities intended for teenagers mainly addresses girls, especially the once carried out by RD, since they run the risk of getting pregnant and therefore are considered to be more vulnerable than boys. It is however the opinion of the evaluators that boys too can benefit from being involved in discussions about life beyond institutional care and even about creating their own families. By addressing gender issues in a more systematic manner the project has the potential to create greater impacts among the different target groups of those living in institutional care.

5.5 The Impact of Swedish Assistance in General Terms

It is the evaluators' assessment that Sida and UNICEF are currently the two donors working at the national level regarding the improvement of the living conditions for orphans and those children deprived of parental care. UNICEF has a broad project of intervention but is very much focussed on trying to enter into a dialogue with the Government concerning children's rights and the fulfilment of the UN Convention of the rights of the child.

In the matter of adoption it would appear that Sida is the only donor supporting activities in this sphere, as is the case for supporting the preparation of teenagers for life beyond institutional care. USAID is currently funding a large scale project being implemented by the Christian Child Foundation. The Supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children component has been made possible by the contribution of the USAID Displaced Children's and Orphans Fund. It is aimed at reducing the number of children in state-administered orphanages and boarding schools and increasing the number of children brought up with their natural families or in a family-like environment. The project targets orphans and social orphans. The activities focus on working with families and social service professionals in selected communities of Belarus to maintain children in families and to move children from institutions into less restrictive environments. This project shares a number of similarities with the Sida financed project but as yet no synergy effects between the interventions have been discerned. The USAID project is implemented in some specific regions in Belarus but appears to have limited links to the national level.

It is the opinion of the evaluators that the impacts of the project could be further enhanced through cooperation with other new initiatives in the social sector funded by Sida. One of these initiatives is to support the development of social shelters in Belarus. Social shelters and those professionals connected to the shelters have without doubt an important role to play in the future of in particular children at risk of becoming social orphans. As stated previously one additional means of trying to reduce the number of children placed in institutional care is to work to with prevention i.e. to support biological families in difficult situations including single young mothers who face for example losing their parental rights or who do not feel able to cope.

5.6 Conclusions

It is the evaluators opinion that while it is difficult to demonstrate direct causal links in terms of impact from the projects activities that there is reasonable evidence to suggest that in certain aspects the project is have positive impacts in terms of the attitudes to adoptions and foster families as well as to the overall awareness of staff working with these vulnerable children and teenagers as to their emotional needs. In terms of impact at the policy and legislative level these are difficult to discern but the close connections between especially RD and government institutions can be viewed as positive in terms of the potential to influence policy.

6 Efficiency

Cost efficiency here mainly concerns the distribution of the project budget, in relation to the results that have been achieved in the project, as well as the level of budget consumption. All calculations on disbursed budget include financial data until December 31st 2007. ¹¹

Component	Budget fees	% of total budget fees	Budget reimbursables	% total budget reimbursables	Budget	% total cost of project
Seminars	234.000	12	679.000	10	913.000	10
Conferences	54.000	3	498.000	7	552.000	6
Staff training	30.000	1	717 000	10	747 000	8,5
Material			321.000	4	321 000	4
Study tours	180.000	9	472.000	7	652.000	7,5
Mothers home			1.000.000	15	1.000.000	11
Advertising camapiagns			119 000	2	119 000	1
Other			681 000	10	681 000	8
Project administration (Sweden and Belarus)	1.486.400	75	2.398.600	35	3.885.000	44
Total cost	1.984.400	100	6.885.600	100	8.870.000	100

Swedish and Belarusian administrative costs constitute 44 percent of the total budget for the project. The administrative costs are relatively high partly because of the complications with running a project in Belarus. RD and ZV have to register the project and the activities supposed to be carried out during the period at the Department of Humanitarian Affairs which is a time consuming activity and could cause delays in the activity plan. The largest bulk of administrative costs goes towards the salaries of those involved in the project, though the costs of this are very low indeed for ZV. The fees for the project manager in Sweden are equivalent to a full time position. It is the evaluators understanding that Adoptionscentrum involves more than one person from the organisation in managing the project

¹¹ Some reallocations have been made within the budget. Fees for a Swedish expert who should have participated at a seminar was reallocated to administration reimbursables for a lap top (24.000 SEK). 18.000 SEK was reallocated from fees to administration reimbursables due to increased rent (18.000 SEK).

Fees were reallocated from activity to activity for Swedish expert (34.000 SEK). Fees for TV-program were allocated to fees for commercials (50.000 SEK).

Reimbursables were reallocated to fees to be able to work on new children's home (3500 SEK, 1000 SEK, 2000 SEK).

Money which was left from a study trip for ZV was used to do a pre-study for the next planned project (22.706 SEK).

though the project manager works pretty much full time on it. In terms of the administrative costs of RD 858 000 SEK covers the costs of nine different members of full time staff ranging from the project manager to the driver and experts. This demonstrates RDs economic dependence on the project for all of its activities. This said it should be noted that a number of those staff working for RD carry out a large number of project activities which means that the total cost for fees in relation to example for seminars is not that high as a proportion of the total budget. The fact that a large proportion of training is carried out by local experts is seen to be very cost effective as well as important in terms of contributing towards sustainability.

The nature of the project– the numbers of seminars, conferences, study tours and staff training – makes the management of the different elements of the project time consuming and requires the involvement of a number of individuals. There are also limitations regarding communication via e-mail or telephone between the Belarusian and the Swedish organizations. This has compelled several visits of the Swedish project manager and Controller to Belarus to help with the project management and the economic reports. Though, the project manager speaks Russian fluently which holds the costs down. This said the administrative costs are high for this project though Sida may have to accept this if one of the aims of Swedish development cooperation is to support NGOs within Belarus.

As the project is has not yet been completed the following table presents costs as registered up to December 2007.

Component	Budget	% of total budget	Used	% total used for component
Seminars	913,000	10	132.901	15
Conferences	552.000	6	88.757	16
Staff training	747,000	8	316.992	41
Material	321,000	4	250,437	78
Study tours	652.000	7.5	347,091	53
Mothers home	1.000.000	11	0	0
Advertising	119 000	1	43,793	30
Round table discussion	34,000	0.5	61,253	180
Workshop	62,000	0.7		
Survey	18,000	0.3		
Preparation for life outside the institution	140,000	2	78,899	56
Development of criterias for the prosperous of the child	12,000	0.5		
Publication	40,000	0.5	9,119	23
Other	375,000	4	212,562	53
Project Administration	3.885.000	44	2.015.148	51
Total cost	8.870.000	100	3.556.952	40
Fees	1.984.400	22	810.477	41
Reimbursables	6.885.600	78	2.746.475	40

It is clear to see from the above table that the project has a large percentage of fees and costs left to either be used or to be registered. It is unclear at the time of writing to what extent the total budget for the project is likely to be used. What is however clear is that a large number of activities have been carried out within the scope of the project to date. A further analysis of the budget does show that ZV has carried out a lot of activities and produced training materials at lower costs per person/product

than RD. ZV has actively sought to find for example the cheapest possible publishing house when printing books for teenagers or their calendars. ZV's position as a grass roots NGO might go some way to explaining their ability and willingness to carry out activities and produce materials at low cost. It is perhaps not surprising that RD an NGO that enjoys closer contacts to government operates in some respects as to what could be called a more state like manner with regard to for example costs for the production and distribution of training materials. It is the opinion of the evaluators that ZV have demonstrated that some types of activities and materials can be produced in a more cost efficient manner.

Assessing whether activities give value for money is not an easy task. The evaluators agree that the production of training materials that can be passed on to individuals who have taken part in the training is important. However, there might be alternative and even cheaper ways of doing this. The evaluators during their mission to Belarus saw some disparities in the effective dissemination of training materials. Some institutions actively use the materials while others do not. Strategies to try to ensure that training materials are relevant and likely to be used beyond the project activities could be explored in more detail so as to ensure value for money in respect of producing such materials.

It is the opinion of the evaluators that the manner in which the budget has been drawn up reflects a balance between the various objectives of the project. A large proportion of the total budget (727 000 SEK) has gone towards the training of staff in children's homes, for example. An area where the evaluators have been able to identify results in terms of the increased awareness of personnel about the importance of putting each individual child's needs first.

6.1 Conclusions

It is the conclusion of the evaluators that the way in which the budget is constructed supports the overall achievement of the objectives of the project. It is unclear at the time of writing what proportion of the total budget will actually be used during the project period as there are a number of months left for project implementation. It is however the opinion of the evaluators that in future planning some more cost efficient ways of producing for example training materials etc and carrying out some types of activities could be explored, especially in light of how some of the training materials are currently used.

7 Sustainability

In the following section of this report the sustainability of the results and to the extent possible also that of the impacts that have been discerned at this stage are discussed.

7.1 The Country's Priorities

One of the important elements for the sustainability of projects is the correspondence with the country's priorities. An analysis of the desk study as well as interviews carried out with a wide variety of stakeholders in Belarus suggest that improving the care and institutional conditions for orphans and children deprived of parental care is viewed as an important issue within Belarus. The fact that new legislation has come in to play regarding various aspects of child care and family benefits reinforces this conclusion.

The project is to a large degree reliant on cooperation with relevant authorities in order to be successful or even permitted. The NGOs working in this area have shown positive and strong working relation-

ships with the authorities which has in turn led to the authorities as seeing them as competent and valuable partners. There is no reason to suggest that this situation will change in the near future.

Some economists have predicted a potentially difficult economic times for Belarus in the future catalysed by Russia's move to increase the price for natural gas.¹² This could have profound implications on work that is conducted in the social sector due to a lack of resources, and the fact that personnel might themselves face more difficult economic times. An economic crisis could also have the effect of precipitating an increased number of social orphans. This would present a challenge to the project in terms of being to work effectively and in a targeted manner. It is therefore important that the project give thought to this scenario in case it becomes a reality.

7.2 Ownership and Participation

The two Belarusian NGOs have demonstrated strong ownership of the issues that they work with and have played a significant role in the formulation of the project objectives and the implementation process. The NGOs have drawn on their own local experts to provide a large proportion of training and have used and adapted Swedish methodologies where appropriate. The NGOs, with strong support from Adoptionscentrum have displayed strong expertise, organisational, networking and analytical skills.

It is the opinion of the evaluators that the energy, commitment and professionalism of the NGOs has in turn contributed to capacity building within many of the institutions in which the NGOs work as part of the project. It is important, however, to remember that gaining the support and understanding not least the directors of the various institutions, is critical in terms of the overall sustainability of the activities. It is not uncommon for directors to feel threatened by the new ideas and methodologies employed as they often witness changes in the behaviour and expectations not only of the children they look after but also their staff. It is therefore important to prioritise establishing good working relationships with directors as well as to involve them in project activities where possible.

A number of project activities are carried out almost exclusively by experts from the NGOs in terms of working with teenagers. The work is generally speaking carried out effectively and positive results are discernable. It is however important to consider how these activities could be funded from within Belarus and preferably government if they are to be truly sustainable. There is no doubt that the involvement of adults external to the various boarding schools is positive in terms of children being exposed to other potential role models, not least in the case of boys as male staff in institutions are few. Nevertheless in the future it is important that these activities are to the extent possible integrated within the 'system' so to speak if they are to be sustainable. It should be noted that the current situation in Belarus does make finding domestic sources of funding and support difficult which is why the evaluators still consider it relevant for Sida to continue funding this type of activity at the current time but the NGOs have an important role to play in talking for example to relevant authorities about the pros of working in this manner.

Interviews with professionals working with the care and living conditions also demonstrated a real willingness to learn and employ new methodologies which further adds to the potential sustainability of the results and impacts of the project. There is however great variation between the institutions in terms of the way in which this knowledge is spread among staff and even retained within the institution as some staff leave to find new employment. A number of training materials have been developed as a part of the project but it is only possible to see in a few institutions that these materials are actively being put to use now that training has been completed. The accessibility of training materials as support in the daily work of the institutions is important to ensure the sustainability of project activities. The evaluators therefore recommend that the project and in particular RD looks at alternative ways of

¹² Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics and East European Economics (2007) SITE country report: Belarus.

producing training materials and also helping to establish structures within the institutions for their use. The latter of which is of course highly dependent on the attitude of the director of the institution. Alternative ways of producing relevant training materials could be the production of amateur videos using a handheld video camera that can be cheaply burnt to CD Rom and distributed. The CD Rom can in turn be played on a computer which the evaluators observed that all institutions visited had access to. This is known to be a cost effective way of disseminating knowledge for example. Books and pamphlets naturally have their place but they again need to be accessible for the staff that are their target group.

7.3 Institutional and Cultural Factors

As previously stated NGOs have currently relatively little room to manoeuvre in the tightly government controlled climate in Belarus. This institutional set up has without doubt an impact on the manner in which the NGOs can operate. This being said the two NGOs have shown a good ability to meet these challenges. RD enjoys close working relations with national authorities which has discussed previously has both positive and negative sides and ZV increasingly being seen as a valuable partner by the authorities within the city of Minsk. There is no reason to suggest that these NGOs risk losing their permits to work at present given the way in which they approach their work nor with regard to the sector in which they operate.

7.4 Financial

It is the evaluators' judgement that the project, in particular the work of RD is very dependent on the financial resources transferred through Swedish support. In RDs case the Swedish contribution is the largest source of income that enables the NGO to employ the staff it does. It is questionable as to the extent to which RDs activities would continue without Swedish support. ZV while reliant to some extent on Swedish support has a wider network of donors and is therefore judged to be less vulnerable as an NGO should Swedish support be stopped or reduced in any way.

7.5 Exit Strategies

There has not been any reference to discussions on an exit strategy for the Swedish commitment to the project and it does not seem like this is considered at this stage. The strong reliance on Swedish support can be seen as problematic but also partly necessary for the project's sustainability.

It is problematic to work without a clear exit strategy as there is no guarantee for unlimited support. The project activities would be greatly affected and difficult to sustain if support was to be diminished or terminated at some point as there has not been formulated alternative methods of operation. On the other hand the reliance on Swedish support has been necessary as there are limited sources of financing for NGO's in Belarus. Nevertheless, the evaluators find it recommendable to consider possible exit strategies and to define success criteria for the Swedish intervention, which would help to ensure long-term sustainability, even though this can seem challenging.

7.6 Conclusions

The evaluators assess that sustainability of the results of the project are somewhat mixed. There is a strong commitment both within the NGOs and among their partners to continue the scope of work but the evaluation shows that the activities are highly dependent on the support that is received. Work to ensure the sustainability of working methods could be strengthened during any future interventions given that now both NGOs now have strong platforms to build upon.

8 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

In this section of the report the main lessons learned from the project are presented in the form of a SWOT analysis and based on this recommendations for future interventions are made.

8.1 Strengths

1. The project supports cooperation between non-state and state actors which is an important step towards the existence of a democratic society, the project does so in an area which is not seen as contentious within Belarus which facilitates quite effective implementation.
2. The project has contributed to the capacity development of the Belarusian NGOs through close contact with Adoptionscentrum. The project has furthermore strengthened the use of local experts through its financial support to the NGOs as part of the project. The fact that the NGOs are able to compensate their own local experts contributes to the overall capacity development of the NGOs themselves.
3. The project addresses relevant social issues in Belarus and is well-designed and implemented.
4. The project has directly contributed to an improvement of the adoption and fostering processes through its work both at the national level through the National Adoption Centre. This demonstrates that targeted cooperation with relevant government bodies can be effective in some areas of development cooperation in Belarus.
5. The project has directly contributed to increased awareness among professionals working with orphans and children deprived of parental care of the importance of placing the needs of each individual child in focus.
6. The project has, most especially through the activities of ZV, contributed towards an increased self-confidence and awareness among the teenage girls that have been a part of the project activities which is likely to stand them in good stead for life beyond institutional care.

8.2 Weaknesses

1. There is no cooperation between the Belarusian NGOs working within the scope of the project which limits the potential for synergy effects.
2. The lack of data concerning results and impacts due to a lack of systematic follow up based on key indicators is a weakness of the project. It is recommended that Adoptionscentrum together with their Belarusian partners work out some key indicators for measuring the success of the project activities be developed prior to starting any further intervention and that they moreover carry out a baseline study.
3. The project tries to tackle the issue of prevention in terms of providing support to single young mothers at risk of giving up/losing their parental rights as well as trying to prepare young women for the transition to life beyond institutions. The effectiveness of the prevention aspect in the wider sense of reducing the numbers of young women who have grown up in institutional care giving up their own children is difficult to measure.
4. The project does not mainstream gender issues to the widest extent possible. Specific attention is paid to the situation of young women through both the activities preparing them for life beyond institutional care, as well as through the support group for young single mothers. However, the

specific needs of for example young men in terms of preparation for life beyond institutional care is only dealt tackled through the activities of ZV. Given that a large proportion of those children living in institutional care are male it is important to give thought to meeting the needs of this target group.

5. Some aspects of the project could be more cost-efficient particular in relation to training materials and their use thereafter. Moreover, a large proportion of the budget goes towards project administration though it is not clear from this budget line exactly what activities are included in this. There is no doubt that the staff at Adoptionscentrum have an important role to play in project implementation and as outlined under 'opportunities' (section 8.3) it is suggested that Adoptionscentrum play a more active role in coaching the NGOs in a variety of ways. It is therefore suggested that the budget is broken down in such a way as to show what type of coaching activities are carried out providing more transparency.

8.3 Opportunities

1. Synergy effects between Sida financed initiatives in the social sector could be explored in more detail. This is particularly relevant in terms of prevention i.e. trying in the first place to reduce the number of children/teenagers placed in institutions by parents unable or not willing to fulfil their parental rights.
2. Future interventions could work to strengthen the positive engagement of the directors of the institutions to encourage the wider use of ideas and methodologies within their organisations.
3. Support from the Swedish partner is vital to the implementation of the project and it seen by the evaluators as highly relevant for the Swedish partners to be more actively involved in supporting the development of new methodologies in Belarus. The NGOs in particular RD would benefit from coaching to strengthen them further as an NGO but also in terms of the methodologies that they employ. Adoptionscentrum has an important role to play in discussing with their Belarusian partners how messages are communicated through training and what these messages are.
4. RD is in a strong position to contribute to the development of monitoring standards for the care of children placed in care through the current project which is one of the next steps to take in improving the conditions for care of orphans and children deprived of parental care. It is important that in the development of these standards that the needs of each individual child are kept in focus. Current government policy supports to some extent the notion that any family is better than no family. RD can in particular use its current expertise and connections to ensure that children placed in family care have the best possible pre-conditions for a happy, healthy childhood.
5. It is stated in the new country strategy for Belarus that Sida is to actively promote tripartite cooperation and that efforts should be made to explore opportunities for cooperation with the Baltic States and Poland. This is maybe something that can be explored in any continuation of the project activities where and if relevant.
6. Adoptionscentrum together with their partners have the opportunity to improve the quality of their reporting to Sida which will facilitate easier understanding of what has been achieved in terms of results within the project. The ability to do this is dependent on the development of key indicators to measure project success and for the project partners to collect data concerning this. Furthermore it is important that reports to Sida include a clear description of any deviations in project implementation as well as an explanation of what actions are being taken if any to carry out activities in the future.

8.4 Threats

1. The political situation in Belarus makes it a difficult situation for NGOs to operate where there is tight control regarding their activity. This can be a hindrance for NGOs to lobby for changes and to even employ some of the methodologies that they would ideally like to.
2. Belarus faces an economic shock that poses a serious threat to the economic stability of the country. According to a report by SITE commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹³, the increased cost of natural gas and reduced oil revenues due to new trade agreements with Russia will have a significant negative impact on the Belarus economy. The implications of this economic shock are difficult to predict, as is the manner in which the government is likely to handle them. Nevertheless it seems likely that Belarus will in some way experience economic difficulties and this might in turn affect for example the way in which government proceeds with the de-institutionalisation process. The government has committed itself to seeking to reduce the number of institutions for orphans and there is already evidence of a reduction in the numbers of children in institutions as well as a reduction in the total number of institutions. It is possible that the government speeds up this process in the light of economic troubles in a bid to save money. If this is the case then it is important that the project has considered such risks/opportunities in any future plans and has alternative strategies for dealing with this.
3. The government proceeds with the closure of institutions for children but at the same time does not provide adequate resources for the preparation of children and teenagers as well as those that will take care of them.
4. The attitude of the various directors of the institutions is critical to the sustainability of the project – directors are not unknown to feel threatened by the new ideas and methodologies that are introduced. It is therefore vital that they are involved in the project activities to the extent possible.
5. It is difficult to get financial support/guarantees from government in Belarus towards the establishment of new forms of care or the introduction of new methodologies. This means that the activities currently funded that are beyond the scope of ‘normal daily’ work are dependent to a large extent on the project this is a threat to the sustainability of some project objectives.

In short it is the opinion of the evaluator’s that the project has been relevant, effective in terms of achieving most objectives and shows already some signs of positive impact though the project is yet to be completed. The cost efficiency of certain aspects of the project could be improved in any future intervention as could some aspects of sustainability. The Belarusian NGOs are in a position to build upon the work that they have done in important new directions which provides them both with opportunities and challenges. It is important that Adoptionscentrum in any future intervention is fully involved in these processes to ensure maximum support not only in terms of following up on the results and impacts of the projects but also in terms of the development and implementation of new methodologies and ways of communication key messages as appropriate.

The evaluators feel that their ability to make judgments about the effectiveness of the project in terms of changes in attitude and behaviour has without doubt been made possible through their ability to observe a number of different target groups and not just through interviews. This would have been more difficult had the project been completed prior to the evaluation taking place.

¹³ Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics and East European Economics (2007) SITE country report: Belarus.

Annex 1

List of Interviewed Stakeholders and Observation Activities

Institution/organization	Names of individuals interviewed and position
Adoptionscentrum	Karolina Jozic – Program officer Ann-Charlotte Gudmundsson – Senior Program Officer
Sida	Rolf Büchel
USAID	Chuck Howell
Roditelskij Dom	Two group interviews with all the staff of the NGO
Zdorovyj Vybor	Two group interviews with all the staff of the NGO
National Adoption Centre	Director of the National Adoption Centre Legal counselor Psychologists Child protection officer
Childrens Home No. 3 of Minsk-city for mentally disabled children	Larissa Volkova, Director; Taisia Kuznetsova, Deputy Director; Olga Baranova, Special Needs Teacher; Galina Smirnova, Special Needs Teacher
Boarding School No. 5 of Minsk-city	Natalia Sharapova, Director; Liudmila Vnuchko, Deputy Director; Nina Malinovskaya, Psychologist; Elena Dedovich, Social pedagog
Borisov Baby Home	Svetlana Diatko, Director; Tatiana Serafimovich, Head Tutor Natalia Podgayskaya, sports teacher, special needs teacher; Natalia Poperetskaya, tutors assistant Natalia Dementey, special needs teacher Observation of a sports lesson Observation of a speech therapists lesson Observation of a group for 2–3 year olds Observation of a group of babies (0–12 months)
Zhodino Childrens Home	Tatiana Kireeva, Director; Galina Rudyuk, Deputy Director; Irina Garmaza, Social pedagog; Irina Tourkova, psychologist; Tatiana Stelmakh, tutor
Boarding School #1 of Minsk-city	Staff: Svetlana Volskaya, Director; Sergey Mistiukevich, boy of 14 Juriy Pavlov, boy of 11 Observation of a cookery class Observation of a breakdance class
Child Home # 6 of Minsk-city	Staff: Natalia Kobrinets, leader of the club for girls; Natalia Korshikova, psychologist Tatiana, girl of 14 Observation of the teenage girls discussion group

Social and Pedagogical Center of Sovetskiy District of Minsk-city,	Staff: Elena Perovskaya, director; Ekaterina Kovrova, leader of Flamingo Club Ekaterina Evseenkova, girl of 15 Marta Kondrikinskaya, girl of 15 Kristina Davydova, girl of 16 Kristina Kulshitskaya, volunteer of 18 Observation of the Flamingo meeting Observation of the single parents meeting
Boarding School #3 of Minsk-city	Ella Shagotova, Director; Alla Gerasimchik, Deputy Director; Antonina Sergeeva, Deputy Director; Marina Poleschuk, Social pedagog; Zinaida Bulakh, Head Tutor

Annex 2 Evaluation Matrix

Criteria	Evaluation Question from Terms of Reference	Indicators	Sources of verification
Relevance	How do the interventions fit and contribute to the operationalisation of the new Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Belarus 2007–2010?	• Linkages between Country strategy 2007–2010 and the project objectives	• Desk study: Country Strategy, PGU and other relevant documents
	Are the Sida financed interventions consistent with the needs and priorities of its target group and the policies of the partner country and Sida?	• Linkages between national priorities • Linkages to needs of counterpart • Linkages to needs of targetgroups	• Interviews decision makers • Interviews project management • Interviews with target groups • Desk study national legislation/policies
Effectiveness	Has the Sida financed intervention achieved its objectives or will it do so in the future?	• Decrease in children in institutional care • Methodology developed and implemented to prepare children for adoption • Methodology developed and implemented to support adopting parents • Increased awareness among professionals working with the care of children in institutions about the needs of children • Increase in number of mothers who keep their children • RD and ZV strengthened as organisations	• Project documentation • Interviews project beneficiaries (organisations) • Interviews targetgroups • Interviews decision makers • Observation of training activities where possible
	Have there been deviations in implementation, and how have these been handled by the project?	• Extent to which the intended projectactivities been implemented	• Projectdocumentation • Interviews project management • Interviews project beneficiaries (organisations)
	What have been the main risks, and risk management, in the ongoing implementation, and which are the specific risks foreseen for any future implementation?	• Changes in strategy, activities of the project due to barriers • Assessment of future barriers	• Projectdocumentation • Interviews project management

Criteria	Evaluation Question from Terms of Reference	Indicators	Sources of verification
Impact	What are the overall effects and results of the Sida financed interventions, intended and unintended, long term and short term, positive and negative?	• Development of state policies on rights of children/young parents to get support • Better methodology implemented for adoptions • Awareness on issues particular to children in institutions have increased among professionals working with these issues in Belarus • Responsible authorities allocate resources to adequately take care of children in institutions	• Interviews decision makers • Interviews projectmanagement • Interviews beneficiaries (organisations) • Interviews target groups
	How have the activities contributed to gender equality, both in qualitative and quantitative terms?	• Extent to which the project targets both men and women, girls and boys, taking into account gender specific problems • Ratio of women/men/girls/boys involved or targeted by the project	• Projectdocumentation • Interviews project management • Interviews beneficiaries (organisations)
Efficiency	Can the costs of the Sida financed interventions be justified by the results, and what is the calculated cost efficiency of the intervention in measurable terms?	• Extent to which the budget mirrors the priorities for intervention and supports the achievement of the project objectives • Extent to which costs for project management been reasonable • Extent to which the same results have been achieved with less resources	• Projectdocumentation • Budgets and disbursements
Sustainability	Will the benefits produced by the Sida financed interventions be maintained after the cessation of external support?	• Extent to which the results are sustainable • Existence of threats to sustainability • Work processes have considerably changed, for example regarding foster families and adoptions • Institutions have acquired and use knowledge actively	• Interviews with projectmanagement • Interviews with beneficiaries (organisations) • Interviews with target groups • Observation of the work conducted in various institutions that have taken part in the project activities
Lessons learned	How is Sida's support related to the total support, in size and impact? Does Sida's support make any difference?	• Comparison with other donor projects • Comparison with state initiatives • Extent of Cooperation/Coordination between Sida funded and other interventions	• Interviews other stakeholders active in field • Interviews decision makers • Interviews projectmanagement • Interviews beneficiaries (organisations) • Interviews target groups
	Provide pros and cons as a background for the Sida decision whether to continue to support this project. Why?/Why not, strengths and weaknesses with regards to implementation and partnerships?	• Analysis of evaluation results • SWOT analysis of future possible future intervention	• Analysis and synthesis

Annex 3 Terms of Reference

Evaluation Purpose

Sida has given support to the project for several years. Before taking a new decision on support of any kind to continue project activities in Belarus, Sida needs to know how efficient the past support has been, its strengths, weaknesses and main results as well as past and future risks and challenges. Sida would also like to have more information on pros and cons, should Sida continue in its present form or change the project's direction. Sida more over needs more analysis and information on the current cooperation and implementing partners of the support, their comparative advantages and any alternatives which may be relevant.

The intended user of this evaluation is Sida's department for Europe.

Intervention Background

Please refer to appendix 1 (Sida's memo).

Stakeholder Involvement

The evaluators shall interview stakeholders from the project's activities in Belarus, when gathering information. These should include, among others, the Swedish partner organisations (if there is one), the Belarus implementing organisation(s), selected groups of project beneficiaries and other NGO's representatives. Other persons involved in the Sida financed projects should also be included.

Evaluation Questions

General questions

- Have the Sida financed interventions achieved its objectives or will it do so in the future?
- How do the interventions fit and contribute to the operationalisation of the new Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Belarus 2007–2010?
- What are the overall effects and results of the Sida financed interventions, intended and unintended, long term and short term, positive and negative?
- What have been the main risk, and risk management, in the ongoing implementation, and which are the specific risks foreseen for any future implementation?
- Have there been deviations in implementation, and how have these been handled by the project?
- How have the activities contributed to gender equality, both in qualitative and quantitative terms?
- Are the Sida financed interventions consistent with the needs and priorities of its target group and the policies of the partner country and Sida?
- Will the benefits produced by the Sida financed interventions be maintained after the cessation of external support?
- Can the costs of the Sida financed interventions be justified by the results, and what is the calculated cost efficiency of the intervention in measurable terms?

Project specific questions

- How is Sida's support related to the total support, in size and impact? Does Sida's support make any difference?
- Provide pros and cons as a background for the Sida decision whether to continue to support this project. Why?/Why not, strengths and weaknesses with regards to implementation and partnerships?

Recommendations and Lessons

If the evaluation concludes that Sida shall be active in this area, the recommendations shall focus on what Sida can do within the present Country Strategy of Development Cooperation 2007–2010 with Belarus and resources, considering also other possible initiatives besides support of this particular project. The pros and cons with different interventions shall be presented.

Methodology

The methodology is to be proposed by the evaluator and decided upon together with Sida. The chosen methods should be described, and justified in relation to possible alternatives, in the tender document. If a qualitative approach will be part of the methodology, a draft questionnaire should be attached.

Work Plan and Schedule

The evaluation shall include field visits to Belarus, possibly by two evaluators, where Sida welcomes one of them to be locally based (such as either Belarusian, Russian or Ukrainian). Information on which sites should be visited and how evaluator's time should be divided between field and reporting phases is to be discussed with the evaluator. *SEK 500 000 may be allocated altogether (per evaluation).*

Reporting

The evaluator shall adhere to the terminological conventions of the OECD/DAC Glossary on Evaluation and Results-Based Management as far as possible.

Evaluation activities performed shall be included in the report. Any obstacles encountered shall be reported immediately to Sida as well as included in the report.

The evaluation report shall use the report format presented in Annex 2 of this ToR. *Moreover a completed Sida Evaluations Data Work Sheet should be presented along with the report.*

The draft final report shall not exceed 50 pages (excluding annexes), be written in English, and submitted to Sida in two printed copies and one digital. Sida shall comment on the report within three weeks.

The final report shall not exceed 50 pages (excluding annexes), be written in English and submitted to Sida in two printed copies and one digital.

The presentation of the evaluation should be included into the work scheme and budget, and to be done as proposed by Sida, such as in a form of a seminar or workshop.

Evaluation reports will be assessed against standard quality criteria for evaluation reporting.

Evaluation Team/Criteria for Sida's Tender Assessment

The evaluation team shall possess advanced knowledge about Belarus and development problems as well as possessing relevant competence for the assignment. At least one of the members of the evaluation team shall have participated in at least one Sida financed evaluation during the past four years. The evaluators should be independent of the evaluated activities and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation. The proposed methodology will also be taken into consideration in the tender evaluation.

Tenders should be sent to Sida via e-mail: max.inverin@sida.se 2nd of December at the latest.

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